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### Review: The Department Chair's Role in Developing New Faculty into Teachers and Scholars By Estela Mara Bensimon, Kelly Ward, and Karla Sanders

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# Academic Leadership Journal

The Department Chair's Role in Developing New Faculty into Teachers and Scholars

By Estela Mara Bensimon, Kelly Ward, and Karla Sanders

Anker Publishing, 2000

232 pp., \$25.95 (plus \$6 s/h)

Reviewed by JoAnn Moody, Vice President, New England Board of Higher Education and New England Director, Compact for Faculty Diversity

Department chairs receive little or no orientation and coaching before they assume their duties. This is unfortunate for them as well as for the new hires brought into the department during their watch. For this reason, this exceptionally clear and well-organized new book is a godsend for new and not-so-new chairs.

The book's three parts focus on Managing the Recruitment and Selection of New Faculty, Developing New Faculty in the First Year, and Developing Faculty Beyond the First Year. Each part contains four to six subsections (for example, planning an effective orientation for new hires, developing productive researchers, explaining evaluation procedures). The subsections are filled with practical details, caveats, checklists (27, to be exact) as well as sample appointment and mid-probationary letters and other documents which chairs can easily adapt for their own purposes. Numerous off-the-cuff and sometimes poignant quotations from chairs, provosts, and junior faculty underscore why and how the book's good practices will save time and cut down on confusion and stress for all involved. Also helpful are the "wise-owl" letters which the authors have solicited from several extraordinarily experienced chairs and provosts (as well as from the dean of faculty developers, Robert Boice). These letters disclose invaluable "tricks of the trade" to chairs as they go about helping newcomers grow into effective teachers and productive researchers, and understand that the collegiality they enjoyed in graduate school may be very different from the collegiality they will have now.

Scenarios throughout the book quickly sketch problems, followed by responses, which give useful suggestions for solutions. For instance, what to do when the history department

unexpectedly receives 200 applications for a faculty post? When a new hire can't find a colleague to discuss research issues? When a new faculty member can't get going on research and scholarship?

The authors realize how bewildered most new faculty are as they prepare for their first day of classes. Before they arrive on campus, newcomers deserve to be clued in by the chair and other senior faculty regarding course load, sample syllabi and book lists, profiles of typical course sizes and students in those courses, and colleagues with whom they can chat who have recently taught those courses. What is so handy in the book are the various teaching, research, and service checklists whose items should be discussed, one by one, with newcomers. Obviously, the overworked chair can readily distribute responsibility for these checklists to several senior colleagues.

The recruiting section is the only part of the book that disappoints. The superficial questions provided for rating and disqualifying faculty candidates are likely to lead the hiring committee into misinterpretations, and to foster bias. Rather than relying on first impressions about the candidate's energy level, facial expressions, and the like – all of which depend largely on the culture, personality, and gender of the beholder – I would suggest the committee's reflecting on what strengths the candidate would bring to the department and its students, and how well the candidate meets or surpasses the job description. To gather answers for these tougher questions, the authors offer a good practice from Stanford's history department. Each candidate "is asked to put together syllabi for courses they would like to teach. As part of this discussion, members of the search committee can ask questions about undergraduate teaching, advising, how the courses they would like to teach fit into the existing curriculum, and how the candidate would teach a particular book or theme."

Such in-depth conversations plus the candidate's performance in several formal and informal settings on campus are far more reliable than a stiff, perfunctory, and "sudden death" interview with the hiring committee. More reliable, too, are the candid details from the candidate's references, gathered by using the authors' excellent list of sample telephone questions.

The Department Chair's Role in Developing New Faculty into Teachers and Scholars is a sound, practical, and engaging resource for all chairs, helping them in one of their most important roles – that of developing new faculty.

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